

At the time of Jesus, leprosy was among the darkest of afflictions—a disease that not only disfigured the body but also cut a person off from family, community, and worship. Declared ritually unclean, lepers were forced to live apart and cry out “Unclean!” to warn others away. It was an illness that brought physical pain, social isolation, and spiritual exile all at once. Yet just as Jesus entered the darkness of leprosy with his merciful love, he longs to enter the darkness within each of us to bring us healing and salvation. While we don’t suffer leprosy, many of us face physical or emotional pain, social isolation, or spiritual exile.

Cardinal Schonborn writes, “In our day leprosy has (almost) vanished from our society, but what has not vanished is the kind of pestilence that separates people and isolates them in their loneliness... they experience their situation like a sort of disease, on account of which many people shrink from them. They are avoided.”^[1] Because of fear and exclusion, people who have fallen victim to drugs, many of the long-term unemployed, those who suffer with depression, and many others suffer silently, isolated from the very relationships that could help bring them healing and strength.

In his recent general audience on September 24th, Pope Leo reminded those gathered that “No place is too far away, no heart is too closed, and no tomb too tightly sealed for the love of Jesus Christ. If at times we seem to have hit rock bottom, let us remember: *that* is the place from which God is able to begin a new creation... May this remind us that if we allow Jesus to enter our own dark places, he is able to create new life in each of us, and we become beacons of hope that radiate the message of salvation for all people.”^[2]

But as we know, the Lord’s healing often unfolds slowly for us. Our healing is often gradual. When we don’t see dramatic immediate results, we assume that God does not wish to heal us. When we are

not healed in the specific way in which we think is best for us, we are tempted to doubt God's love for us. But as Fr. Peter John Cameron reminds us, "Healing often happens on the way. God's intervention in our life is not distinct from the living of our life. Rather, God reveals his saving power while we are en route."^[3] In other words, healing comes as we live our faith. Often times God uses time to strengthen our faith as we await healing. Only with strong faith can we recognize the healing in our lives, and recognize the strength of God which strengthens us.

The Gospel warns us of another danger—not just impatience in waiting for healing, but forgetting where true healing comes from. And if we forget the source, we miss the true gift. The Jewish lepers don't return to offer thanks to Jesus, possibly because they do not recognize that He is the true source of their healing. Hans Urs von Balthasar states, "Clearly Jesus alone accomplished the miracle that took place while the lepers made their way to the priests, but the liturgical prescriptions of the law were so decisive for the lepers who were Jews that they located the meaning of their healing entirely within the prescribed ceremonies. (That is, they were so focused on getting to the priests that they forgot about God.) This is not unlike many Christians who ... forget the grace bestowed by God who is the origin and goal of going to church... (Their perfunctory, occasional practice of religion) often has little to do with genuine Christian life, and (it then) becomes little more than pure custom, unexamined tradition."^[4] Our liturgical practices have great meaning and value for us as Catholics, but when we completely lose sight of the meaning, then ritual is emptied of influence, and we quickly lose interest. Many Catholics do not come to mass because they have lost sight of the purpose of ritual, the purpose of liturgy, which is to encounter the living God, and thus to strengthen our relationship with Him.

All ten lepers receive physical healing. But only one of them, the foreigner, receives the more important, inward spiritual healing.

Perhaps because he was not Jewish, he recognized that his true healing would not be completed by a ritual act of showing himself to the priests, but rather he recognized that the love and mercy of Jesus Christ was the true source of his healing, and so he rushes back to Jesus – he must be near the very source of life. And he is rewarded with the greatest healing of all, the gift of true faith. Bishop Mueggenborg explains, “Ten of them received the gift of health, but for one of them, it became the gift of faith and a real relationship with the Lord. Only one leper was able to be thankful... He is thankful not only for the gift he receives, but above all for the presence of God in his life who generously bestows such blessings... Saving faith recognizes every gift as coming from the hand of God, praises God for it, and offers it to the Lord to be used according to his will.”^[5]

And this is the heart of the message for us today: gratitude opens the door to faith, and faith unites us to the Lord himself. Physical cures, as wonderful as they are, will never be enough—what Christ truly longs to give is the healing of our souls – this is the only path to eternal life.

^[1] Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, *Jesus the Divine Physician: Encountering Christ in the Gospel of Luke*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 140.

^[2] Pope Leo XIV, *General Audience*, Saint Peter’s Square, Wednesday, 24 September 2025, English version, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2025/09/24/250925c.html>.

^[3] Peter John Cameron, *To Praise, To Bless, To Preach: Spiritual Reflections on the Sunday Gospels, Cycle C* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1999), 123.

^[4] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Light of the Word: Brief Reflections on the Sunday Readings*, trans. Dennis D. Martin (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 354.

^[5] Daniel H. Mueggenborg, *Come Follow Me: Discipleship Reflections on the Sunday Gospel Readings for Liturgical Year C*, 2nd ed. (Herefordshire, UK: Gracewing, 2020), 362–63